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JAUFRE 3633 AND THE MATHEMATICS OF PASSION

ROSS G. ARTHUR



NUMBERS mean trouble in medieval manuscripts, as authors and scribes all too often save ink, time and parchment by resorting to numerals, instead of writing them out in full. There is nothing easier than losing an *i* from *iii*, or misreading *m* as *iii*, or substituting one single-letter numeral for another. Even when a manuscript spells out the number word, there may have been an error one or two stages back in the transmission, and this last scribe might be expanding an incorrect abbreviation. In many texts, we can spot errors and make emendations on the basis of comparison with other references in the text, with facts deduced from the text, or with facts known from outside the text. If a historical manuscripts says that something happened *ii* days later, and we can count three intervening days, or if it has an army making a journey ten times faster than possible, we are usually justified in emending. Things are rather different, of course, with literary texts: to pick an extreme exemple, no one, I think, would emend Catullus' "Give me a thousand kisses" on the ground that there would not be time before the lady's husband came home.

Even where the emendation of numerals in a literary text seems to be justified on the basis of a comparison with another portion of the text, it is best to be cautious. One such case has drawn my attention to a rather subtle narrative touch in the Provençal Arthurian romance called *Jaufre*. Line 3633 in the Lavaud-Nelli edition reads "*Qe .c. cavalier tuit armat*" (than one hundred knights fully armed), and a footnote explains that the editors have rejected the ".x." of Brunel's base manuscript A to make line 3633 accord with line 3810, where this statement is repeated with "cent" in the rhyme position. Within the confines of the chosen editorial principles, the

emendation is unexceptionable: line 3810 does indeed read “Qe si eron ab armas cent” (than if there were a hundred with their arms), and “cent” could not possibly be an error for “.x.” since it rhymes with “garniment” in line 3809, and it is true that in these words the heroine Brunissen is repeating what the hero Jaufre said at lines 3633ff.

It would not, however, be quite accurate to say that Brunissen is quoting Jaufre. By having her move into indirect discourse, the author is giving us an insight into her own thoughts, not simply a rehearsal of what Jaufre has said. If we wish to know what is going on here, and to evaluate the need to emend, we must examine the whole literary context.

Jaufre has been captured by Brunissen’s knights and brought into her presence. She is furious with him because he has entered her private garden, disturbed the birds there, and prevented her from falling asleep. Even before she meets him, she has threatened him with death: “«Fort mal,» dix ela, «m’a servit / Cel q’es e mun verger intratz, / Qe als ausels espaventatz / Nils a faitz giquir de cantar, / Qe greu poirai huimais pausar. / E anatz veser qi lai es. / Si es om, sia mort o pres»” (ll. 3206-3212) [«The one who entered my garden has served me very ill,» she said, «frightening the birds and stopping them from singing. Now I’ll scarcely be able to rest. Go see who is there, and if it is a man, let him be killed or captured!»]. Once they are actually in each other’s presence, however, the hostility between these two people begins to moderate. Jaufre looks at her, and the more he looks the more his heart is moved: “E pres mot fort a esgarar / Sun fron e son col e sa cara, / Qe fo fresca e blanca e clara, / Sa boca e sus oils plasens, / Clars e amoros e risens, / Qel sun ins el cor devalatz. / Aisi fo leu enamoratz” (ll. 3610-3616) [He began to admire her forehead, her neck, her face, so fresh and white and bright, her lips, her charming eyes, so bright and loveably laughing. It pierced him right to the heart, and he was in love]. Brunissen, for her part, is still threatening him with all sorts of horrible tortures, but her manner of expression shows that she too is being moved by what she sees: “«E dic vos qe, se Deus m’ajut, / Fort aura en vos bel pendut, / O bel orp, o bel escasa, / Qe ja enans no er dema / Tro qe sia de vos venjada»” (ll. 3603-3607) [«I tell you, God help me, you’ll make a handsome (corpse when you are a) hanged man, or a

handsome blind man, or a handsome cripple. Before it's tomorrow, I'll be revenged on you»].

The attraction between Brunissen and Jaufre comes as no surprise to us, for we have known all along that these two people belong together, either from our experience of other romances or from the fact that they are the only characters given lengthy physical descriptions (Jaufre, ll. 523-546; Brunissen, ll. 3130-3150) which stress their beauty and loveability. Jaufre's problem is that the lady he loves is planning to have him killed, and Brunissen's problem is that she must reconcile her love for Jaufre with her desire to keep up appearances before the people of her court: how can she admit that she loves a man no one has ever seen before, especially since she has vowed to have him killed? It is during the monologue in which she attempts to sort out these conflicting impulses that she repeats Jaufre's words.

The full statement that Jaufre makes is now important. He says (keeping the unemended numeral from the manuscript): "«Domna, tot a vostre talent / Podetz far, e a vostra guisa. / De me, car en vostra camisa, / Senetz totz autres garnimens, / M'auriatz conquist pus corens / Qe .x. cavalier tuit armat, / Tan vos ai bona voluntat»" (ll. 3628-3634) [«My lady, you may do with me whatever you will, whatever you please. Wearing no other armor than your dress, you could have conquered me more quickly than ten armed warriors, so much good will do I feel toward you»]. The word "ten" here should not be seen as the product of a rational calculation of the number of men whose strength would equal Brunissen's controlling powers over Jaufre's heart. It is a statement of his admiration for her, the first overt move he makes in the game of love.

Brunissen shows in her monologue that she is unsure about her own feelings, and unsure about Jaufre's sincerity. She understands his speech as a declaration of love, but also realizes that it may be a ploy to save his skin: "«Ben soi fola, pauc ai de cen, / C'aiso dic per descelamen, / Per so qes vol de tu emblar!»" (ll. 3811-3813) [«Oh, but I'm a senseless fool! If he said that, it was a deception, because he wanted to escape you!»]. Her ambivalence will persist to the end of the episode. In the morning when she comes down from her room to find Jaufre, she must force herself to appear furious (*fes parven que fos trop mala*, l. 4044). Nevertheless, when she is told (wrongly) that Jaufre has been killed and is dead in his bed, "Ab tan venc vas

lu leit de briu, / Qe tot mort lo cujet trobar, / Car no pot pus l'amor selar" (ll. 4078-4080) [She rushed toward the bed, unable to hide her love, and expecting to find him dead]. When she finds that the bed is empty, because Jaufre has escaped during the night, she is furious again, although now her anger is directed at her seneschal. He is the one who will die, if he can't find Jaufre and bring him back, though what she intends to do with Jaufre is now more problematic than ever.

It is with this complex of contradictory emotions as a background that we need to consider her "repetition" of Jaufre's statement. As part of her attempt to understand her feelings, and as part of her search for evidence concerning his, she says: "«Mais eu no sai jes, per ma fe, / Sun cor, s'el s'asauta de me, / Si fa! c'asatz o fa parer, / Can dis qel pusc mils retener / Nuda, senes tot garniment, / Qe si eron ab armas cent»" (ll. 3805-3810) [«Yet, by my faith, I do not know if his heart is pleased with me. But yes! He showed it well when he said that I, naked and without any armor, could hold him better than a hundred armed men»]. She makes three significant changes in Jaufre's words as she embeds them in indirect discourse. First, if we keep the manuscript numerals, she increases the strength attributed to her ten-fold. MS B takes things a step further, for it reads "Qe s'erion ab armas cinc cent." Secondly, where he has imagined her wearing a dress, she imagines herself naked. Finally, where he has spoken of quick conquest (m'auriatz conquest pus corens, l. 3632), she speaks of better holding (mils retener, l. 3808).

The consistent thrust of these changes suggests that it would be as wrong to alter the text to make the numbers coincide as it would be to try to change "naked" back into "in a dress" or "hold" into "conquer." Brunissen's speech should not be judged, understood or modified according to the standards of mathematical accuracy, but should be recognized and appreciated as part of the poet's demonstration of the havoc Brunissen's desire plays with her memory of Jaufre's words.

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